

# Child and Family Services Update

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## New Employee Research Project

*By Jerna Mitchell, New Employee Training Manager*

I remember my very first day on the job. My supervisor came in and handed me a file for a case where the juvenile court had ordered a young man into our custody. The 24-hour hearing was at 9:00 am, and I was to facilitate a meeting with community partners about meeting the needs of this young man. Looking back I realize I had unintentionally adopted my friends' philosophy of "Fake it until you Make it."

Looking back, I wish my supervisor had been in the same office that I was in, that Child and Family Services had offered more skills based, child welfare specific training, and that a structured mentoring program had been available to ground me in how Child and Family Services does their work. Our goal is to support the creation of a new employee training program that offers structured training and mentoring to new employees that helps them develop a desire to stay with Child and Family Services through retirement.

The Utah State Legislature was concerned about caseworkers being thrust into a job for which they were untrained and unprepared. In 1999, they passed statute 62A-4a-107 which requires new employees with less than two years' experience to complete Child and Family Services' core training and to observe and accompany a minimum of two experienced workers as they observe them doing their job.

Child and Family Services shares the Legislature's interest in preparing new employees to work effectively and feel competent in working with families. To support this effort, Child and Family Services has initiated a research project that will track the training, caseloads, and mentoring experiences of all new employees for their first year of employment with Child and Family Services. Our goal is to assess the effectiveness of the training and mentoring. In addition, we will track caseload size and the way that cases are assigned to a new worker.

As we track the statistical information gathered from supervisors, workers, SAFE, Finet, and the Training database we invite new caseworkers to share their experiences and provide feedback about the experience they had during this first year of work with Child and Family Services.

- Did the training meet your needs?
- Did you have the skills and tools to meet the needs of your families?
- Did you have enough cases to practice the skills you were learning, but not so many that you were overwhelmed?
- What has your experience been?

Our hope is that we will learn what we can do to further support new employees in their jobs, provide training and mentoring materials that meet new employees' needs, and increase retention because new employees find success in working with Child and Family Services.